Amber M. Epp, Hope Jensen Schau, & Linda L. Price

The Role of Brands and Mediating Technologies in Assembling Long-Distance Family Practices

Increasingly, circumstances such as divorce, employment commuting, and military service have resulted in the geographic dispersion of family networks, and this reality holds both risks and opportunities for brands, products, and services embedded in family life. The authors leverage a longitudinal design including group interviews (initial/follow-up) and participant diaries to track how families' consumption practices shift in response to separation, morphing across time and place to retain and strengthen family bonds. Their findings generate a framework that explains how and when colocated consumption practices reassemble through technologies across distances. The framework considers practice dimensions, separation type, motivation, potential/realized capacities, and mobilized technologies to forecast potential practice trajectories under conditions of extended separation. Five potential trajectories emerge: no trial, heroic quests, failed trial, easy translations, and sacred pieces. The authors' discussion of managerial implications provides suggestions to enable companies to anticipate trajectories and take action to enhance brand use and loyalty to ensure that their brands survive reassembly within existing family practices or become integral to new family practices that feature the brand.

Keywords: geographically dispersed networks, connected consumers, family consumption practices, brand loyalty, assemblage capacity

> The Perry family experiences daily life across a 2,300-mile divide. Kamilla is an environmental scientist in Washington, D.C.; her husband (Douglas) and youngest daughter (Emma) live at the family's home in the southwest United States; and their oldest daughter (Eva) lives and works in the Midwest. Kamilla voices her concerns with this arrangement: "Because I am gone,... it's really important to ... make sure I'm not disconnected from their lives." The family describes the challenge of "actually causing an intersection" of family activities. Due to varying levels of comfort with diverse technologies, time differences that often prohibit fixed-time practices (e.g., birthday dinners), and a host of failed trials, the Perrys' most important family practices often are disrupted and abandoned as they struggle to find a way to rescue them.
>
> —Vignette from interview data

The backdrop of family life is shifting. Whereas home used to be the site of families' most intimate and meaningful interactions, technologies now act as substitute spaces. Today's families brave complex, global environments in which mobility and distance from loved ones mark the new normal (Urry 2011). Trends converge to account for the rise in long-distance families. Dual careers and economic circumstances foster extended work commutes for both privileged and poverty-stricken families (Holmes 2009). As a result, as of 2011, 3.6 million Americans lived in commuter marriages, a 30% increase over the preceding decade (U.S. Census Bureau 2011). Families are geographically dispersed as a consequence of military deployments, and 44% of those serving in active duty have children (1.2 million children affected) (*Science Daily* 2011). Changes in family structure also contribute to families living separately. More than 19 million U.S. children have a nonresident parent (often as a result of divorce), and anticipated changes such as college and empty nesting result in dispersion (U.S. Census Bureau 2011). Finally, increased mobility for school and employment unmoors people from their hometowns, leaving grandparents and extended family networks struggling to participate in family practices (Cherlin and Furstenberg 2009). No matter the reason, the desire to maintain valued family practices occupies many families' time and resources. The opening vignette exemplifies the increasing reality of families stretched across locations and time zones.

These realities challenge existing theories and offer opportunities for marketers to facilitate dispersed practices. Dispersed family life spurs disembodied and dematerialized interactions (e.g., sharing digital rather than printed photos) that change how products/brands are involved in family practices. Researchers fear that without colocation, the

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important characteristics of family practices will be lost (Urry 2002, 2011). We dispute this claim by demonstrating how practices and embedded products/brands can survive without colocation; moreover, opportunities emerge for creating new family practices and embedding brands within them. Innovative companies are beginning to facilitate dispersed practices (e.g., Bloomingdale's virtual coshopping, Xbox Kinect's online gaming, GetGlue's social TV). Our findings suggest solutions to anchor brands in family practices to help them survive and evolve.

We investigate how and under what conditions long-distance families reconfigure consumption practices through technology. Families contemplate whether and how to hold on to practices and vary in their ability and motivation to do so. They may reconfigure some practices through technology (both high and low tech); others are postponed for when they reunite. Although some separations are planned, families may not be mindful of how practices become diluted, happen less frequently, or are abandoned. We collected longitudinal depth interviews and participant diaries of families experiencing a physical separation to address the following questions. First, how do families reassemble consumption practices as tech mediated during separation? Under what conditions are practices maintained, altered, and/or displaced during separation? Second, what are the implications for brands? How can marketers leverage knowledge of how practices are reassembled to help these evolving consumption practices succeed and ensure that their brands are trusted partners in this success? We begin by identifying the relevant research that informs our study.

Practice Theories

We focus first on practice theories, given their direct relevance to our phenomena. Consumption practices such as family dinners are often ensconced, durable practices that make up family life, define family identity (Epp and Price 2008, 2010, 2011), and rely on products and brands for enactment (Warde 2005). Practices such as sisters' shopping trips or couples' video-game playing also help constitute relational identities. We define practices as behaviors consisting of interconnected components including bodily activities, mental activities, materials, and background knowledge (Reckwitz 2002, p. 249). Most practices "require and entail consumption.... [It is] a moment in almost every practice" (Warde 2005, p. 137). Marketers are interested in the materials and meanings of practices because brands become embedded in family practices (Warde 2005). In these cases, the brands are referred to as "fortress brands" because they are protected as part of rituals that connect people (Brady 2007). In the aforementioned examples, Target is the sisters' shopping site and Xbox is the couple's gaming platform. Thus, considering practice theories that explain colocated practices can help researchers understand brand loyalties.

Practices encapsulate much of what constitutes consumers' experience of products and brands (Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello 2009). Although marketers recognize that practices are essential to brand loyalty, they have received little strategic attention (Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello 2009; Warde 2005). Marketers have predominantly focused on individual consumers' brand experiences and their contribution to brand loyalty rather than on how complex networks of brands and relationships are embedded in practices (Arsel and Bean 2013; Canniford and Shankar 2013; Epp and Price 2010; Schau, Muñiz, and Arnould 2009; Thomas, Price, and Schau 2013). Not surprisingly, use patterns within social networks influence consumers' loyalties; however, how and why they do so has been underexplored (Kozinets et al. 2010; Nitzan and Libai 2011). Research has only recently begun to address strategic implications of communal relationships for brand management (Brown, Kozinets, and Sherry 2003; Cova and Cova 2002; Epp and Price 2011; Schau, Muñiz, and Arnould 2009; Vargo and Lusch 2004).

Although scholars agree that practice theory is less a single perspective than a grouping of theories (Schatzki 1996, 2002; Warde 2005), together, the basic tenets are useful for understanding consumption. An important contribution is the concept of viewing practices as a unit of analysis, thus showing how objects in use gain meaning and connect people (Reckwitz 2002; Shove, Pantzar, and Watson 2007; Warde 2005). This fundamental shift turned the field's focus to consumers' social action in everyday life. Another key tenet states that practices require regular performances to reproduce meanings and structures (Bourdieu 1990; Reckwitz 2002). Practice theorists emphasize the continuity of practices as routinely carried out by cohorts (Halkier, Katz-Gerro, and Martens 2011; Schatzki, Cetina, and Von Savigny 2001; Warde 2005). We adopt this idea to describe the inertia and consequential weight of families' elaborate practices. A final assumption across practice theories is that practices have trajectories. Performances are sometimes differentiated across cohorts because understandings, values, and enactments differ (Warde 2005). Furthermore, people may morph practices in reaction to crises (e.g., in the absence of relevant materials for performance). Recognizing that practices adapt grounds our assumption that practices may shift during separation.

Practice theories have two limitations for investigating movement from colocated to tech-mediated practices: (1) tech-mediated consumer practices are undertheorized and underresearched and (2) practice theories do not account adequately for change, and thus, we know little about how people reassemble practices across space and time. Regarding the first limitation, practice studies typically assume a physical, bodily performance and tangible material environment (e.g., Nordic walking, cooking, farming) (Schatzki 2002; Shove and Pantzer 2005). Practice theorists who examine the "simultaneous presence of participants in a single setting ... [emphasizing] face-to-face interaction" or the layout of objects configured in particular spaces (i.e., to facilitate the "correct" or "acceptable" performance) take embodied performance for granted (Schatzki 1996, p. 189). Despite sweeping changes in materiality's role in the digital age, relatively little theory or research exists on tech-mediated consumer practices (Magaudda 2011; Ritzer and Jurgenson 2010). Even when practices are tech mediated, as in brand communities, the role of technology in collective practice

performance has escaped theoretical focus (Schau, Muñiz, and Arnould 2009). Research on family consumption practices has exclusively focused on colocated practices (e.g., Epp and Price 2010, 2011; Moisio, Arnould and Price 2004). Our study challenges the boundaries of copresence to explain what families gain and lose in the tech-mediated space whereby interactions between disembodied performance and dematerialized culture differ from their colocated counterparts.

Practice theories' second limitation follows a common criticism: they "account poorly for change" (Southerton et al. 2012, p. 240). Most empirical studies are not designed to capture changes in practices over time and cultural space (Warde 2005). A few studies have broadly examined how global circulation of technology affects consumption (Shove, Pantzar, and Watson 2012; Wilhite 2008), how cross-cultural shifts over time affect a cultural practice (Southerton et al. 2012), or the emergence and evolution of a practice (Geisler 2008; Humphreys 2010; Moisio, Arnould, and Price 2004; Shove, Pantzar, and Watson 2012). Previous research is limited to cultural snapshots of shifts in practices and meanings over time, or it only tangentially examines practices. How practices' particular characteristics influence their evolution is largely missing from this stream of literature (Shove, Pantzar, and Watson 2012). Some micro-level research has examined how integration of new material objects shifts consumption practices for individuals (Magaudda 2011) or within consumer networks (Epp and Price 2010) as well as how objects are transported from one practice location to another (Hui 2012); however, this research is sparse. As practices move into dynamic, deterritorialized, and complex spaces, we must map how they evolve. Thus, the current research combines a theoretical approach with practice theory to better explain the dynamics of how families reassemble their practices as tech mediated.

Integrating Assemblage Thinking

We explicitly introduce assemblage thinking to practice theories to capture the requisite components and conditions for reassembling family consumption practices at a distance; in essence, we use assemblage theory to examine practice change directly. Whereas recent research has drawn on assemblage theory to describe how consumers orchestrate practices (Canniford and Shankar 2013), ours is the first to use it to examine disruption and evolution of practices. We extend practice theory by reframing disrupted family practices as assemblages. "Assemblages" refer to emergent wholes made up of heterogeneous components in which "a part may be detached and made a component of another" (DeLanda 2006, p. 18). Disruptions challenge practice routines and continuity as new relations and capacities among components emerge. The uses of embedded products and brands are tenuous during disruption.

Assemblage theory is concerned with component dynamics in complex, adaptive systems (Bennett 2010; DeLanda 2006; Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Latour 2005; Sassen 2006). Experience is conceptualized not as being but as becoming (DeLanda 2006). The theory articulates how components have capacities to electively couple and decouple with other components, thus affecting the collective capacities of assemblages and broader social systems (Sassen 2006). Assemblages (such as a family practice) emerge because of the interactions of diverse components within. Conversely, most previous literature "takes practices to be enduring entities reproduced through recurrent performance" (Shove, Pantzar, and Watson 2012, p. 8). Thus, such works emphasize repeated configurations of the same components. Assemblage theories reframe practices as made up of components that have capacities to decouple, change, or abandon a practice in interplay with other components. The capacities and relations among components influence a practice's ability to adapt (DeLanda 2006; Sellar 2009). Although new to consumer analysis, assemblage theory has much to contribute to consumption research (Canniford and Shankar 2013; Lury 2009; Thomas, Price, and Schau 2013). To shed light on how family practices can evolve from colocated to tech mediated and retain their core meanings, we depict practice components as fluid, rather than fixed, and emphasize their capacities to assemble into different configurations.

We introduce an emergent framework depicting movement from colocated to reassembled, tech-mediated practices. We identify forces that influence how this movement unfolds and account for experiential gaps. Next, we map five common practice trajectories. Nuances such as practice dimensions, component/assemblage capacities, types of separation, and roadblocks to practice reassembly reveal unexpected trajectories. Our data provide insights into how family practices can survive distance; in addition, we offer direct strategic implications for marketers to influence their brand's trajectory to remain or become a key resource in families' consumption practices.

Methodology and Research Design

Using a longitudinal three-phase design, we examine family practices before, during, and after a prolonged physical separation. Phase 1 includes in-depth group interviews with families to uncover practices the participants identified as central to defining the family and/or coalitions (e.g., siblings, parent–child). The group setting allows for collective reflection, layering of accounts, and coconstructed data (Epp and Price 2011). These interviews also establish communication and technology behaviors typical of the family. Interviews took place in families' homes and ranged from 40 minutes to three hours, with the average interview lasting 90 minutes. We then agreed on a set of practices for the family to track during separation.

Phase 2 uses participant diaries to track the evolution of practices identified in the previous phase for approximately three months (Zimmerman and Wieder 1977). Given the impossibility of observing these practices directly, diaries offer an appropriate proxy to firsthand observation when coupled with the follow-up interview (Zimmerman and Wieder 1977). Multiple family members completed diaries, and entries focus on changes in the frequency, materials, performance, and presence/absence of practices during separation. The diary entries enable us to track the movement of various practice components. Phase 3 consists of follow-up group interviews. Using the diaries, we tailored the

interviews to uncover changes in family practices and technology use. This method relies less on simple recall by providing an activity log to prompt memories as a basis for deeper discussion (Zimmerman and Wieder 1977).

We collected data from 71 family members representing 25 families. Table 1 provides additional data about each family. Data collection began with 7 families of college freshman recruited through neighborhood mailing lists and postings. These families offer a baseline of family life, followed by a clear and expected first separation and then a period of reunion. We used additional neighborhood postings and snowball sampling to capture other types of separations, including commuting, divorced, and military families. These separations can be expected (e.g., college, remote grandparenting) or unanticipated (e.g., divorce, military deployment, occupational relocation) life transitions and are often ongoing (multiple separations).

Early in the study, we found that the follow-up group family interviews provided little additional value and prohibited busy families from participating. Thus, we collapsed the group interviews into one phase and modified the interview guide to capture how family practices differ when separated versus colocated. Eleven families participated in all three phases of data collection. The remaining families supplemented their modified group interviews with diaries and individual family member updates through e-mail or video chat. We continued to interview participants until we reached theoretical saturation at 22 families (Creswell 2006; Glaser and Strauss 1967). We used purposive sampling to find negative cases to examine the boundaries of our emerging framework. Looking for negative cases is an active search for data points that contradict or are at variance with already established data patterns (Creswell 2006). Although participant families are diverse with regard to family characteristics, type/length of separation, and range of technology behaviors, we enlisted three additional families who represent technologically savvy families. Examination of negative cases revealed different practice trajectories, illuminated the importance of the technology ecology, and exposed intensified component capacities. Table 1 summarizes our participant families.

Following grounded theory procedures (Strauss and Corbin 1990), we used an inductive approach to analysis. We analyzed data within each family, coding at the level of the consumption practice and tracing outcomes and circumstances for survival and displacement. Then, we analyzed across families to examine patterns and identify common practice trajectories. We conducted member checks with five families who provided additional reflections and insights about how our findings might apply to their circumstances. This analysis is an ongoing, iterative process that requires back-and-forth examination of theory and data (Spiggle 1994).

Framework for Consumption Practice Reassembly

Our emergent framework (Figure 1) is derived from our data and shows a practice's general movement from being colocated to being reassembled and tech mediated during physical separation. Our data reveal an experience gap between colocated practices and reassembled, tech-mediated versions. Tech-mediated versions often lack certain components, participants, contexts, and emotionality embedded in colocated versions. The framework depicts families' practices before separation (colocated) on the left, whether/how these practices are reassembled as tech mediated on the right, and considerations that help anticipate existing patterns that affect the experience gap in the center. These considerations include practice dimensions, separation event, motivation, potential/realized capacities, and the mobilized technology ecology. Next, we unfold how families reassemble colocated practices as tech mediated. We explain how the type of separation shapes families' motivations and capacities for reassembly as well as how families mobilize and revise their technology ecology during this process. Families reduce the experience gap between colocated and reassembled practices by diagnosing the nature of the gap, boosting capacities, and realigning components for practice resilience.

Practice Dimensions

Figure 1 illustrates that practices, made up of many components, exist on a continuum from simple to elaborate and can be broken down into several dimensions: emergent/intentional, flexible/time and/or space dependent, and few/many. Consider the elaborate practice of Keller family game night. The Kellers incorporate many objects and brands into this practice, including board games, snacks, drinks, and favorite game pieces. Game night always happens in the living room after the evening meal and is planned and intentional. Participation includes the whole family, with well-defined family roles (e.g., Mom keeps score, Grandpa never wants to play but cannot resist jumping in). In contrast, game night for the Steinberg family is a simple, flexible practice involving only cards. It emerges naturally, and roles and participants fluctuate. Many elaborate family practices would be considered rituals because of their symbolic nature and patterned, serious performance (Rook 1985), whereas simple practices were less sequenced, more lighthearted, and emergent.

Separation Event

Separations disrupt family rhythms and jostle practices (e.g., interviewee Matthew Kennedy noted, "It's not the same.... I'm just not in the flow of what's going on here [at home]"). Separation type shapes the level of difficulty of moving practices to a tech-mediated space and whether families are motivated to try to do so. Some separations are anticipated (e.g., college, remote grandparenting), whereas others are unanticipated (e.g., job relocation, divorce). Available templates of reassembling practices during separation are also important. Anticipated separations that have widely available templates for reassembling practices (e.g., previous experience, communities of support, depictions of connected families) help families imagine reassembly and may motivate them to close experience gaps. For example, Target's "Everything for U" campaign promotes electronics

TABLE 1
Participant Families: Summary Characteristics

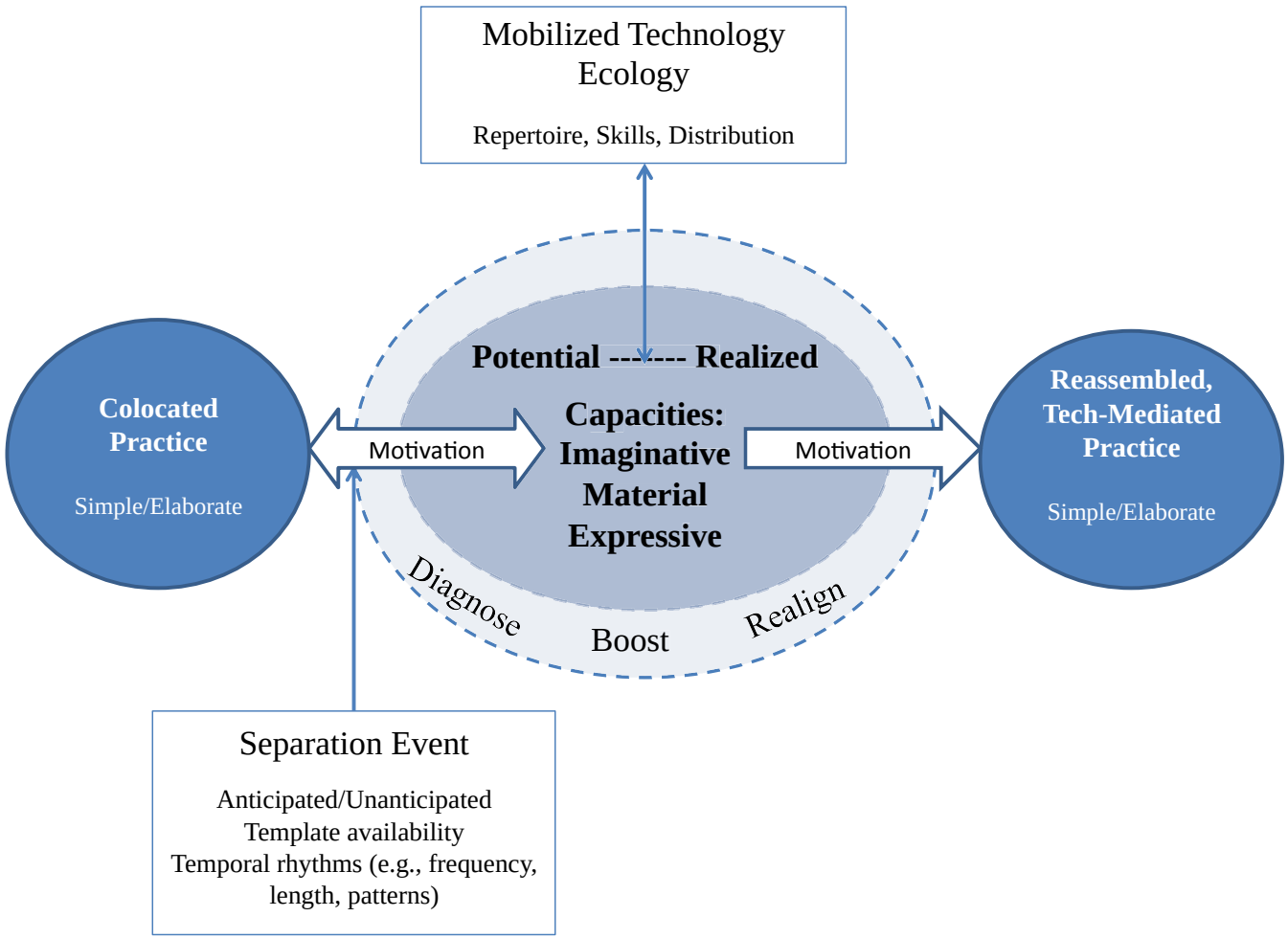
Surname	Form	Family Members (Relationship, Age in Years, Occupation)	Reason(s) for Separation/Distance
1. Thomas	Single-parent (D)	*Jack*[a] (father, 54, self-employed); *James*[a] (son, 20, student); Zeke (son, 24, student)	James joined brother Zeke at college (130+ miles away); Jack and James were estranged from Zeke and Jack's ex-wife (James and Zeke's mother)
2. Foster	Traditional	Jed[a] (father, 48, attorney); Bethany[a] (mother, 52, attorney); *Michael*[a] (son, 18); Rosalie[a] (daughter, 15)	Michael left for college (1,400+ miles away)
3. Duncan	Traditional	*Jason*[a] (father, 50, unemployed); Maggie[a] (mother, 47, teacher); Amelia[a] (daughter, 19, student); Aaron[a] (son, 16)	Amelia left for college (65+ miles away)
4. Brady	Traditional	*Noah*[a] (father, 55, writer); Sophia[a] (mother, 54, retired teacher); Elliot (son, 21, student); *Zeb*[a] (son, 18)	Zeb left for college (300+ miles away)
5. Lieberman	Adoptive; single-parent	Sandra[a] (mother, 56, social services); Holly[a] (daughter, 18, student)	Holly left for college (110+ miles away)
6. Steinberg	Single-parent (W)	Ben[a] (Father, 50, parts manager); Talia[a] (daughter, 18); Macy[a] (daughter, 15)	Talia left for college (100+ miles away)
7. Potter	Single-parent (D)	*Claire*[a] (mother, 49, speech instructor); *Heidi*[a] (daughter, 18, student); Lily[a] (daughter, 14)	Heidi left for college (1,700+ miles away)
8. Keller	Empty nest	*David*[a] (father, 53, stay-at-home dad); *Maggie*[a] (mother, 53, software engineer); Molly (daughter, 30, artist); *Venessa*[a] (daughter, 28, graduate student)	Adult children (Molly 2,100+ miles away and Venessa lives 80+ miles away)
9. Kennedy	Traditional	*Matthew*[a] (father, 31, graduate student); Katelyn[a] (mother, 31, nurse); Abby[a] (daughter, 5); Nate (son, 1)	Matthew commutes for grad school (80+ miles away)
10. Moore-Mason	Couple (dating)	*Seth*[a] (boyfriend, 28, attorney); *Kayla*[a] (girlfriend, 28, graduate student)	Long-distance relationship; they live and work in different cities (150+ miles away)
11. Baker	Couple (married)	*James*[a] (husband, 30, finance); *Madeline*[a] (wife, 30, graduate student)	Long-distance marriage; they live and work in different cities (1,200+ miles away)
12. Bryant	Single-parent (D)	Sienna[a] (mother, 40, student); Irina[a] (daughter, 18); Isaiah (son, 7)	Irina visits her father (Sienna's ex-husband) during the summer (1,200+ miles away)
13 Powell	Couple (married)	Dylan[a] (husband, 34, nonprofit organization manager); Mallory[a] (wife, 28, office manager)	Dylan travels around the country for three months each summer for work
14. Marino	Blended family	*Nora*[a] (stepmother, 46, real estate agent); Mason[a] (father, 47, crane operator); Kurt[a] (son of Mason, 18, student); Cameron (son of Mason, 23, military); Miles (son of Mason, 15); Kylie (daughter of Mason, 19); Scarlett (daughter of both, 4)	Kurt lives in Arizona; Nora, Mason, and Scarlett live in California; Cameron lives in Texas (military base); Miles lives in Utah (special-needs school); Kylie lives in Southern California (estranged)
15. Peterka	Empty nest	Cara[a] (mother, 57, health care executive); Max[a] (father, 55, golf professional); Kalli[a] (daughter, 24, public relations); *Charlotte*[a] (daughter, 19)	Charlotte left for college (2,100+ miles away), and Kalli works in a different state (500+ miles away)
16. Perry	Traditional	Kamilla[a] (mother, 55, environmental scientist); Douglas (father, 57, professor); *Emma*[a] (daughter, 18); Eva (daughter, 23, teacher)	Kamilla works in Washington, D.C. (2,300+ miles away); Eva lives in another state (1,100+ miles away)
17. Vaughn	Single-parent (D)	*Julia*[a] (mother, 44, accountant); Dave[a] (son, 20, student/military); *Summer*[a] (daughter, 19, student); Russell[a] (son, 11); Stella[a] (daughter, 13)	Dave is at boot camp (for one month); Summer is at college; Russell lives with his aunt due to behavioral issues (240+ miles away); their father is in prison (for four years)

TABLE 1
Continued

Surname	Form	Family Members (Relationship, Age in Years, Occupation)	Reason(s) for Separation/Distance
18. Norris	Traditional	*Delilah*[a] (mother, 55, retired/student); Barry[a] (father, 67, retired engineer); Skylar[a] (son, 19, student)	Skylar left for college (500+ miles away)
19. McDaniel	Empty nest	*Sarah*[a] (mother, librarian); Mike[a] (father, retired Air Force); Helene (daughter, student); *Hillary*[a] (daughter, 19, student)	Helene and Hillary left for college
20. Kuntal	Couple	Patrick[a] (husband, 35, Coast Guard); Jade[a] (wife, 32, surgical resident)	Separated in the past for military leaves and wife's residency
21. Brush	Empty nest; blended family	*Kelly*[a] (mother, 57, professor); Colin[a] (stepfather, 55, engineer); Quinn (daughter, 23, software engineer); *Eli* (son, 19, student)	Eli left for college (500+ miles away); Quinn lives in another state (500+ miles away)
22. Chang	Traditional	Jaclyn[a] (mother, 51, computer engineer); Cai[a] (father, 53, professor); *Jenna*[a] (daughter, 18, student); Caroline (daughter, 20, student)	Jenna left for college (2,700+ miles away); Caroline is also at college (800+ miles away and studying abroad for a semester)
23. Knox	Traditional	Olivia[a] (mother); Steve[a] (father, physician); Mitch[a] (son, 16, student); Jared (son, 19, student)	Jared left for college (450+ miles away)
24. Barro	Traditional	Soledad[a] (mother); Marko[a] (father); Wade[a] (son, 28, graduate student); Trisha (daughter, 25)	Adult children (5,800+ miles away)
25. Benson	Traditional	Elise[a] (mother, 53, homemaker); Charles[a] (father, intelligence analyst); Marisa[a] (daughter, 22, student); Monica[a] (daughter, 17, student)	Marisa is at college (820+ miles away)

[a]Participated in the interviews.
Notes: Pseudonyms are used. Participants provided their occupational titles and age data. Family members who completed diary entries are italicized. D = divorced; W = widowed.

FIGURE 1
Conceptual Framework for Reassembling Consumption Practices During Separation



that "keep you connected" to family and friends, including mobile phones, Internet-enabled multiplayer game systems, and cameras to share experiences. In contrast, for the Perry family (described in the opening vignette), few templates are available to reassemble practices when a parent lives three time zones away with a demanding job, even though the move was anticipated. Sometimes families face unanticipated separation *and* lack templates (e.g., sudden job loss/relocation and a lack of resources and support). Under these conditions, motivation to reassemble practices may be dampened by the sheer magnitude of the task. Finally, unanticipated separations such as sudden deployment of military personnel may give families little time to prepare, but there are readily available templates and resources that can help families imagine practice reassembly. For example, Military.com has forums to include deployed family and friends in holiday celebrations and everyday family practices (e.g., shopping, homework).

Many family practices rely on family members coming together in particular times and places, but distances create disconnected rhythms that make it difficult for paths to cross. The temporal rhythms of a separation event also affect the motivation and capacities of families to reassemble practices as tech mediated. By "temporal rhythms," we refer to the frequency, length, and pattern of absence. In the Perry family, the mother lives far away and works late hours. Her temporal rhythms are at odds with the family's, which requires motivation and imaginative capacity to reassemble time- and space-dependent practices. Families who endure frequent or prolonged separations, like the Barros, with a son abroad, are motivated and experienced in identifying imaginative ways to adapt practices. Over time, these families often expand their technologies and relax practice components, making them more mobile. Conversely, when separations are short and infrequent, families show less motivation to expend the effort.

Potential/Realized Capacities

Practices vary in their capacities to reassemble across time and space. We define "capacities" as what components are "capable of doing when they interact with other social entities" (DeLanda 2006, p. 7). Important to closing the experience gap is ensuring component capacity to reassemble. Figure 1 identifies three types of capacities: material, expressive, and imaginative. Material capacities describe the potential for bodies/people, things, objects, spaces, or

brands to interact in a reassembly (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). Components available in digital formats or in dispersed locations boost material capacity. For the Fosters, local restaurants had low material capacity to reassemble in dinner practices, whereas for the Duncans, Subway restaurants had high capacity because of their accessibility. Expressive capacities describe the potential for emotional tone, gestures, facial expressions, symbols, and sentiments to interact in a reassembly (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). Video/chat capabilities that capture gestures and expressions boost expressive capacity. Interviewee Wade Barro recalls, "My mom went through very, very hard times. Last year she had three major surgeries ... [but] they would bring the computer to the hospital and would show her to me. Then I saw that she was alive and smiling. That was quite important."

Imaginative capacity describes the potential to creatively envision components interacting in a reassembly. As noted previously, separation type affects families' motivation and ability to imagine reassembling practices as tech mediated. Imaginative capacity, emergent in our study, often motivated families by providing a vision of the reassembled practice and paths to achieve it. Other research has underscored the motivational importance of envisioning accomplishing a goal (Chan and Cameron 2012). Imaginative capacity can compensate for the absence of materiality and expressiveness. For example, the Potters envisioned a solution to long-distance grandparenting, enabling Grandma to attend a gymnastics meet using Flip Video without being present at the gym. Imaginative capacities incite ways to decouple meanings from specific objects, spaces, and forms of participation and mobilize these meanings to reassemble. Families can boost imaginative capacity through various sources: by accessing available templates, experimenting through trial and error, or accumulating related skills and knowledge over time.

Capacities depend not only on the characteristics of each component (e.g., does the book come in a digital format?) but also on relations among components (e.g., do the family's technologies support digital books?). Capacities remain dormant if the right components are not pulled into the reassembled practice. Each component has capacities that limit and boost potentialities for reassembly. For example, imaginative capacity ignites reassembly by motivating families to be innovative about revising their technology repertoire, replacing material components with ones that might work better, or capturing expression in new ways. In the Chang family, the father (Cai) originally only used the cell phone for emergencies and always encouraged his daughters to talk face to face, "but of course when they're away, then you know, we need to use it [the cell phone], and we will use that to talk to each other." In the Perry family, Dad does not like phones of any kind, and the daughters are unlikely to answer their phones. They are struggling with how to connect. One daughter, Eva, notes that it "works better when we Skype actually. Emma [the other daughter] is better at talking on Skype than she is on the phone." However, Emma admits, "We try to Skype, but we're really bad at it [laughter]," and Kamilla, the mother, acknowledges, "We've had some technology issues." To assess capacity at the practice level, we examine across component capacities and consider their relations. A practice combining high capacities of key components that complement one another will have a high capacity to reassemble, whereas practice reassembly might be implausible without realignment if key components are low or if those necessary to activate other component capacities are absent (e.g., participants reveal a lack of suitable technologies, which hinders practice reassembly). In other words, capacities stack from the component level to the practice level.

Mobilized Technology Ecology

Figure 1 illustrates that practice movement is both facilitated and inhibited by a family's technology ecology; Turkle (2010, p. 188) notes that "technologies live in complex ecologies. The meaning of any one depends on what others are available." Ecologies describe the environment of existing uses and rules for connecting and interplay among technologies. We characterize a family's technology ecology by their repertoire of technologies, members' varying skill levels, and the distribution and synchronicity of technologies within the family. Families mobilize technologies to ensure that component capacities are realized and to close experience gaps between colocated and reassembled, tech-mediated practices. Many families increase material, expressive, and imaginative capacity by integrating new technologies and skills during separation (e.g., "I never thought I would text;... that wasn't my world ... but eventually I had to learn" [Sienna Bryant, mother]). Families draw on material, expressive, and imaginative capacities to enhance their technology ecologies over time. Patterns of technology use before and during separation contribute to the meaning of a particular technology and how, if at all, each is used to preserve family practices and embedded brands.

Reassembled, Tech-Mediated Practice

The right-hand side of Figure 1 depicts the reassembled, tech-mediated practice. A practice successfully reassembles if the tech-mediated practice retains core meanings and essential components of the original practice. As practices reassemble, components with low capacities may drop out, whereas others are elevated in importance. Components are decoupled, rearranged, and then reconfigured on the other side, and core meanings may be carried through reassembly by different components, detached from some objects and picked up by others. In some cases, a practice fails to reassemble, such as when a family does not engage in the practice during separation. As a result, the core meanings and practice components are lost or only retained as part of the colocated practice when the family reunites. We document these potential transformations in the next section.

Shifts from Colocated to Reassembled, Tech-Mediated Practices

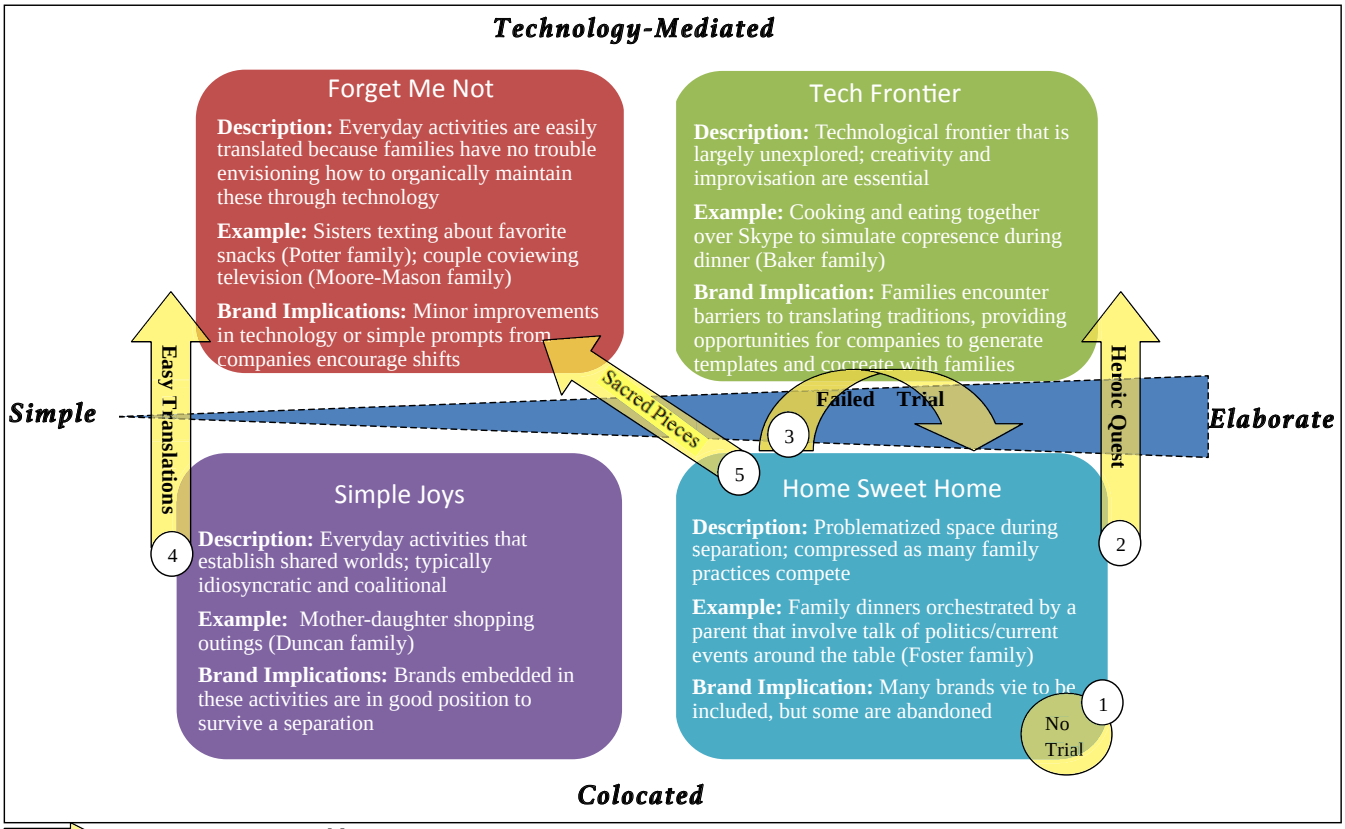
Figure 2 offers descriptions and examples of the relevant spaces that practices move between, using two dimensions:

the extent of elaboration (defined by practice dimensions) and whether the practice is colocated or tech mediated (including high and low tech). Using these dimensions, we first examine four quadrants: "Home Sweet Home," "Simple Joys," "Forget Me Not," and "Tech Frontier." Next, consistent with our findings, we depict the experience gap between colocated and tech-mediated practices as wider in the case of elaborate practices and narrower for simple practices. Finally, we unfold five common trajectories emergent from our findings that are used to bridge the gap. These trajectories trace the likely paths for practice reassembly.

Colocated Practices

Home Sweet Home. Depictions of families in media and literature are often characterized by elaborate, colocated practices (lower right-hand quadrant of Figure 2). Researchers tend to focus on the practices families consider sacred, such as family dinners or ritualized holiday traditions that are culturally loaded and normatively shaped (Epp and Price 2008; Rook 1985; Wallendorf and Arnould 1991). Families are mindful about these practices when confronted with separation. We expect families to strive to retain them. However, elaborate practices are ritualistic, with formal scripts that specify time and performance, various essential artifacts, and patterned roles for participants (Rook 1985); they are complicated to enact. At first glance, families who are spread across distances abandon elaborate practices, with consequences for embedded brands. However, deeper analysis reveals that families merely postpone these practices until they can personally engage in them. Consequently, the elaborate, colocated space depicted in Figure 2 is highly problematized as families stockpile sacred practices during colocation. With little time together, families experience shared time as compressed and harried—such as when children are home from college or when commuting parents join their families. In the Peterka family, Thanksgiving was the most important. However, with two daughters away at college (and one on a swim team), the family reluctantly abandoned trying to get together for Thanksgiving and adopted Christmas as their major holiday, feeling that this time too was compressed

FIGURE 2
Shifts from Colocated to Reassembled, Tech-Mediated Family Consumption Practices



Denotes practice assemblage trajectories

(#) Indicates managerial implications for moving practices and brands from colocated to reassembled, and mediated by technology:

1. Realign by **shifting to a new trajectory** to escape the "no trial" trap (e.g. no longer a safe space [brands are often traded off], but the practice could be rescued by leveraging essence).
2. Boost capacities with **cocreated templates** to facilitate "heroic quests."
3. Realign key components to **eliminate low-capacity** and emphasize high-capacity components to overcome "failed trial."
4. Boost capacities with **basic prompts** for "easy translations."
5 Realign a pared-down version of components to **leverage essence** for "sacred pieces."

"because she couldn't be home for a lot of it,... her break was truncated a lot." Attempts to "fit everything in" dominate descriptions of colocated family time, resulting in trade-offs, sacrifices, and shifts in meaning from some sacred practices to others. Brand competition in this space is high.

Fortress brands are no longer "safe" in this space because families prioritize some elaborate practices over others and allow once-sacred practices to lapse. The Kellers' adult daughters live in separate states from the rest of the family and each other. In the first interview, the family discussed the importance of board games:

> David: That's [playing board games] been consistent since you were kids.... They learn that there are rules;... you have to be creative in how you use your resources .... I've always thought of board games as a very useful tool for parenting.... It teaches kids a lot about the way life is.... Like Trivial Pursuit, everybody can join a team…
>
> Maggie: We'll play Apples to Apples…
>
> Interviewer: Okay. What do you think would be lost if all of a sudden your family stopped playing games?
>
> Venessa: I think we would not interact with each other as much, and we'd start focusing on external things ... like watching a movie or watching TV…
>
> David: Right, I think we would—
>
> Venessa: Or, dispersing, and not doing anything together after dinner—
>
> David: Exactly. We would segregate.... We consciously try to avoid [that] with family get-togethers.... That to me is ... atrophy of the family.

Board games prevent "atrophy of the family" and avoid separation of family members into individual spaces or activities. However, in the follow-up interview, the Kellers admitted that they trade off board games in favor of cultural practices such as going to museums or the theater when they all get together. David characterizes board games as a declining practice in his diary entries, writing that "there is no technology that would allow us to play when we're apart." When asked about his diary entry in the follow-up interview, David explains that time spent together is finite and full of activity:

> We have short, less time that we spend together,... and a time-consuming game is taking up a chunk of the time. We want to, kind of, accomplish other things with our time too.... Say we're visiting and seeing each other within a two-day period.... We want to prioritize the cultural event.... The board game winds up being [an] end-of-the-day/evening thing that gets truncated and shortened and crowded out.... There's a limited amount of time. The board games often get ... shuffled off to the side. (Keller family, father)

The families expressed trade-offs among practices; the significance of some practices is elevated, whereas others are demoted or omitted. Through this process, families learn about prioritized practices and whether and how meanings are retained if constraints are relaxed (e.g., the Knox family noted that Thanksgiving need not happen at home and that the turkey can be preordered from Marie Callender's).

Epp and Price (2010) find two factors to explain families' trade-offs: (1) the biography of a practice and (2) its place in a web of other practices, objects, and spaces. Some practices have a long history and are likely to be retained. Similarly, practices can be displaced by competition from other practices or objects. Epp and Price's (2010) study deals only with colocated practices. When families face separation without actions to salvage practices across distances, this quadrant (Home Sweet Home) becomes even more compressed, with some practices sacrificed for others. Furthermore, when shifted to a tech-mediated context, practices are challenged because they are taken out of familiar spaces, detached from complementary practices, and shuffled into competition with a new set of practices. Our framework accounts for how practices survive when families no longer share a physical space. Multiple trajectories (elaborated subsequently) are linked to the colocated Home Sweet Home space. The "no trial trajectory" (Keller's board games) exacerbates competition/trade-offs and is a tenuous position for brands. The "heroic quest trajectory" moves practices relatively intact, retaining their core meanings, but is incredibly difficult to achieve. These attempts are often "failed trials." Finally, the "sacred pieces trajectory" moves the essence/meaning of the Home Sweet Home practice without retaining all of the practice components.

Simple Joys. The Simple Joys practices in Figure 2 (lower left-hand quadrant) are typically considered profane, defined as "ordinary and part of everyday life" (Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1989, p. 6). In contrast with elaborate practices, simple ones are playful and naturally emergent, idiosyncratic, and often coalitional. Simple practices involving subsets such as sisters sharing their favorite snack (the Potter family), mother–daughter shopping outings (the Duncan family), or brothers playing their guitars together (the Thomas family) constitute relational identities. These relationships are commonly instantiated in small practices that evolve organically (e.g., inside jokes, favorite television shows). These simple practices are typically only recognized as important when they were missed during separation. Although simple practices do not hold the cachet of revered family rituals, they are the everyday substance of relationships and often involve special brands, products, and activities. They require few components, are flexible rather than time and/or space dependent, and are therefore less vulnerable to displacement by other practices and easier to adapt. They are taken for granted and less intentional; thus, they are less likely to be mentioned as important before a separation event.

Tech-Mediated Practices

Forget Me Not. Forget-Me-Not practices are tech-mediated practices that families reassemble from either simple or pared-down versions of elaborate, colocated practices. Migration to this space (Figure 2, upper left-hand quadrant) typically occurs organically. Examples from our data include family members shopping online together and sharing deals at Kohl's and other stores ("We disclose our discoveries of specials" [David Keller, father]), sisters texting pictures of brands/activities they used to share (Potter

family), and fathers and sons playing ESPN fantasy football online (Thomas family).

Tech Frontier. The Tech Frontier (Figure 2, upper-right quadrant) represents practices families reassemble from elaborate, colocated practices. Despite the difficulty of moving elaborate practices into the Tech Frontier, new platforms for interaction make this space enticing. Only negative cases in our sample (extremely tech-savvy families) engaged with this space. For example, sisters Marisa and Monica Benson collaborate in the online game *MapleStory*. Not only do they play the virtual game together, but the sisters establish new temporal rhythms and copresence as a place to talk when they are separated ("We can have our characters sit down, and we can have those little ... chat bubbles pop up" [Marisa Benson]). The sisters were avid gamers together before Marisa went off to college. However, the games they played together were not available online, so they turned to *MapleStory* to reassemble their gaming practice. This practice underscores the need for high-capacity platforms to meet family challenges in the Tech Frontier.

Practice Trajectories

We identify five reassembly trajectories that move practices from colocated to tech mediated: no trial, heroic quest, failed trial, easy translations, and sacred pieces. Our framework (Figure 1) emphasizes the general path of movement from a colocated to a reassembled, tech-mediated practice, while Figure 2 details specific trajectories. Figure 2 shows that elaborate (simple), colocated practices lead to a wider (narrower) experience gap. Moreover, the extent of elaboration affects which trajectory the practice is likely to follow to bridge that gap. Simpler practices are likely to follow the easy translations trajectory, whereas the trajectory for more elaborate practices depends on the families' mobilized technology ecology as well as their motivation and ability to diagnose, boost, and realign practice capacities.

No trial (trajectory 1). Many families do not attempt to move elaborate practices to tech-mediated spaces. Previous literature has suggested that families have strong commitments to more elaborate performances, and these rituals incorporate a broad array of brands and products (Epp and Price 2010; Rook 1985; Wallendorf and Arnould 1991). Despite families' claims that these practices were among the most important, many are relegated to colocated interactions. Not surprisingly, disruptions challenge families' ingrained consumption practices (Andreasen 1984), forcing reprioritization either consciously or through inertia (Epp and Price 2008, 2010). When Matthew Kennedy is home on weekends from his commute to graduate school, he spends his time reading bedtime stories and going out for Kopp's Frozen Custard with his kids at the expense of time with his wife, which is lost in the flurry of daily activity: "[We used to] sit there with hot chocolate, and create this Taster's Choice moment right then ... [whereas now we just] slap hands on the way out." Although practices are reshuffled, explanations for why families do not attempt central practices across distances are revealing.

Dimensions of elaborate (vs. simple) practices contribute to a wider experience gap between colocated and tech-mediated spaces such that families are less able to reassemble these practices. First, elaborate practices involve many minimum requirements for enactment. This increases the likelihood of a large gap between colocated and tech-mediated practices because many of the components are unlikely to be included in reassembly. For example, the Foster family provides a detailed account of family dinner: Mom orchestrates a home-cooked meal, Dad and Michael talk politics, and the family "shares the day" around the table. Multiple variations include favorite restaurants and brands as well. However, since Michael left for college, Foster family dinners have changed.

> Bethany (mother): "I feel like we've done less family things.
>
> Jed (father): We, I think that's right. We probably spend more time together when both kids are here…
>
> Interviewer: How has family dinner changed this semester without Michael?
>
> Jed: It's much quieter. Rosalie's not the talker like Michael is…
>
> Bethany: And sometimes I think with fewer of us.... We'll read or something instead of interact, so…
>
> Jed: The rules are falling down.
>
> Interviewer: Okay, so during dinner you're texting with friends?
>
> Rosalie (daughter): Yes.
>
> Jed: So, have we been to [local restaurant]? No.…

Michael's absence from the dinner table changes things completely: conversation tapers, parents read at the table, the daughter texts friends, and most associated restaurants/brands are abandoned until Michael returns home for break. Many of the brands involved exhibit low material capacity because they are local, making them unavailable to all members at once.

Second, elaborate practices may not reassemble as tech mediated because time and/or space dependence and expressiveness are difficult to simulate with existing technologies, increasing the experience gap. Cultural templates provide taken-for-granted rules about what is required to enact specific activities. Consider that the idealized family dinner is equated with "home-cooked food, planned and prepared most often by a woman, eaten at a regular time, according to prescribed etiquette" (Larson, Branscomb, and Wiley 2006, p. 4). For some families, the reality that technology has low expressive capacity and is unable to capture contextual elements prevents them from experimenting with technologies that might reassemble a practice during separation.

The families' imaginative capacities affect the experience gap and contribute to the no trial trajectory. Many families such as the Fosters are unwilling or unable to envision how to reassemble rituals as tech mediated. Jed Foster supposes, "We could put a computer screen on the table and Skype you in while we have dinner. That would be too weird though."

Bethany agrees, "That's too extreme." The family's imaginative capacity, manifested as their potential to envision themselves engaging in family practices using technology, illustrates a key factor in determining their success. It is difficult to imagine replicating detailed, time- and space-dependent practices, especially when families have little experience with separation. Ironically, the Fosters allow technology to erode the family meal (such as when the daughter texts during dinner) but do not have the imaginative capacity or motivation to enlist technology to reassemble the practice.

As detailed in our Figure 1 discussion, separation event characteristics—such as whether the separation is anticipated, the availability of templates, and differences in temporal rhythms—shape families' motivations for reassembly and affect the experience gap (e.g., large time zone differences make enactment of time-dependent practices difficult, disrupting family rhythms). Although college is anticipated and families prepare for separation, college student families such as the Fosters may not feel motivated to reassemble practices in tech-mediated spaces, because anticipating future time together curbs fear of loss. Also important is variation in rhythms in similar separation events—for example, in the Steinberg family, the college student returns every weekend, whereas in the Benson and Norris families, college students return only for school breaks (and sometimes not even then).

Finally, a smaller repertoire, lower skill levels, or asymmetric technologies can lead many families to experience a larger gap between colocated and tech-mediated practices, as with the Fosters' frustrated efforts to reassemble family dinner. Although Michael often Skypes, his parents characterize themselves as low tech ("I hate e-mail.... I don't like to text. I don't like the cell phone. I think it's just a huge intrusion" [Jed, father]). Members of the Foster family do not agree on the appropriate technologies for different forms of communication (e.g., e-mail for logistics, letters as more meaningful, telephone for emergencies). Skype's capacity is unexercised in the reassembled practice because the other components necessary to activate it are absent. Thus, it is important to consider the interaction of components and how they link to practice survival.

Heroic quest (trajectory 2). Separated families feel challenged to connect and preserve some centrally held practices. Nonetheless, their motivation and capacity to do so vary. There is always a gap between elaborate, tech-mediated practices and their colocated counterparts. Retaining these rituals in a tech-mediated form could be likened to a heroic quest (see Figure 2, moving from bottom to top right-hand quadrants); it requires creativity, mindfulness, resources, and commitment to preserve a practice's key elements and close the vast experience gap. We find that motivated families with high imaginative capacity can compensate for the lack of (or low) material and expressive capacities that occur when reassembling elaborate practices.

The Bakers' long-distance marriage spans more than 1,200 miles and makes them experienced at separations. They are an example of the reciprocal relationship between imaginative capacity and the technology ecology (see Figure 1). The Bakers have a broad and synchronous technology ecology that they have built up through trial and experimentation over time. Furthermore, the Bakers leverage their imaginative capacity by improvising ways to close the experience gap. Their innovative use of technologies and ability to relax rigid structures (time and/or space dependence) help ensure practice survival. They cook and eat dinner together on Skype and simulate the copresence that occurs when living together: Madeline (wife) explains, "We'll put on Skype and not really talk, but just will *be* together." James (husband) concurs, "Skype is a bond." This translation of an elaborate, colocated practice seems natural and easy for the Bakers, whereas for other families, it seems foreign and intrusive. Skype enables expressive capacity by capturing the emotions of the practice; James and Madeline can see each other's expressions, gestures, and movements. Furthermore, we observe high material capacity because recipes are digital and brands are widely available. As a result, the dinner practice survives relatively intact; the reassembly mirrors the objects, spaces, participation, and core meanings of the original practice.

To explore the heroic quest trajectory, we enlisted negative case families, who possess especially broad technology ecologies. Like the Bakers, the Barros are experienced at separation and highly motivated to learn and use tools that enable them to connect meaningfully. The Barros expanded their technology ecology to boost once-inactive capacities:

> Soledad (mother): The way we live is through ... a computer screen.... We participate a lot in his [her son Wade's] life, and he continues to participate in our life.... It's a marvelous instrument for us because when he traveled, for the first few months, using the Internet wasn't that easy. We didn't have a laptop with camera. So [we] would talk over the phone, and it was very expensive…
>
> Wade (son): Probably six months after I was here, I created my first e-mail... a Hotmail account, and I barely knew how to use it. It was very foreign to me. But still, with e-mail you can't really communicate much.... A year after I was here,... she [Soledad] bought me ... a web camera.... I can see things that, like they buy a new car, or they have a party, and then they turn on the camera and I can almost participate, yeah.
>
> Soledad: We feel the presence, his presence. We feel he's participating, and that's very gratifying for us.

Adding new technologies boosted the material and expressive capacities necessary for practice survival. Indeed, the Barros often host large parties with extended family, and Wade exclaims, "They put me on one of those tables. Yeah. They don't put me, they put the computer, but it's almost as if I'm sitting on the table." Family members rotate visiting with Wade during the party. These families are rare in their ability to close the experience gap and reassemble elaborate practices. As in the no trial trajectory, such practices are regularly resigned to colocation.

Failed trial (trajectory 3). A lack of imaginative capacity often separates failed trials from heroic quests. Low-capacity components derail motivation and efforts to reassemble practices. Families' technology ecologies are a frequent source of low material and expressive capacities,

and differing technology preferences may prohibit trial. In contrast, tech-savvy families are able to assemble material, expressive, and imaginative capacities to carry out heroic quests and prevent failed trials. When families use technology to connect over different activities and daily interactions, they provide scaffolding to support more extreme heroic quests. For example, the Knox family considers it less daunting to celebrate Thanksgiving over iChat in the coming year because they have used it to "visit" their son's college dorm room and watch his basketball games ("We've gotten used to seeing things from afar").

The Kennedys illustrate factors that contribute to a failed trial. Matthew, who commutes to graduate school, describes trials to preserve a bedtime stories ritual with his five-year-old daughter, Abby. This elaborate practice involves many components: picking out her favorite books, sharing the day, snuggling with daddy, being surrounded by her "Snugs" (mini blankets), turning on the rain noisemaker, and so on.

> There was this one book that she really latched onto,... and she's like, "Who'll read it to me when you go back to school?" I'm like, "Well, Mom can read it to you." And she's like, "No, I want you to."... "Well, Daddy could try, and Daddy could take it to school and I could call you, and read it over the phone."... Typical Abby, when it actually comes time to doing that, she's like, "No, that's kind of a pain." ... I think she's gotten used to [it].... I'm gone four nights, and then I'm back home. (Matthew Kennedy, father)

Reading bedtime stories in person is vivid and emotional and holds Abby's attention, but the tech-mediated practice is flat and loses contextual elements that make the practice meaningful; thus, participation has low expressive capacity. Family members see no bridge to surmount the gap.

In failed trials, multiple forces work against families. To retain elaborate practices, families must reassemble and combine many components to bring practices to life. The possibility of low capacities on any one component makes failure more likely. Restricted technologies exacerbate the problem. The Kennedys could have boosted the low material capacity of Abby's favorite books (e.g., by purchasing digital or recordable books), but the family's restricted technology ecology may have precluded these possibilities.

With few available templates, likelihood of failure is more pronounced because families do not know what to expect from a tech-mediated interaction, and reality often falls short. Low imaginative capacity also contributed to the Kennedys' failed trial. In the absence of templates to boost imaginative capacity, the family was unable to reassemble bedtime stories by compensating for low expressive capacity. To rescue the practice, the family could realign components by partnering with different technologies (e.g., digital books) or boost expressive capacity by experimenting with ways to visualize expressive elements (e.g., Abby might snuggle with her teddy bear in her father's place and have her mother start the noisemaker). Colocated, embodied participation involves a complex system of expression, but the vocabulary of touch and physical action is translatable. Imagined touch can engender powerful effects, similar to actual physical touch (Peck, Barger, and Webb 2012).

Failures make families wary of reassembling other practices using new technologies, so it is important to overcome initial barriers. Although families may resume failed practices when they reunite, our data typically reflect a vague potential to try again (e.g., the Brady family says that doing so is "on the back burner" or "way off in the future") without evidence of following through. Some families are more persistent and committed to trial than others. Perhaps if Matthew's absences were more prolonged, he would be motivated to boost material and expressive capacities to reassemble bedtime stories with Abby.

Easy translations (trajectory 4). Easy translations mark another potential trajectory. Everyday colocated practices (Simple Joys) are more readily carried across distances than elaborate practices. These tech-mediated, simple practices populate the Forget-Me-Not space, in which companies and consumers collaborate to unite family members in organic, subtle ways (shift from bottom to top left-hand quadrants in Figure 2). Here, we observe a narrow experience gap.

Our findings reveal underlying features that make practice reassembly easy. First, our framework shows that simple practices require fewer components for performance, so contextual factors are easier to replicate. Expressive and material capacity requirements are minimal, and there is little need for imaginative capacities. In these cases, families can effortlessly adapt these practices. The Moore-Masons, working in separate cities, coview their favorite television shows:

> Kayla: When we're away, like there's a couple shows we usually [watch].... We would have this routine where we, it was almost like a date, but like, we'd both be watching TV and then like—
>
> Seth: Sitting in separate cities.
>
> Kayla: During the commercial, Seth would call and we'd talk about it for like two minutes, and we'd be, "Okay, [the show is] back on, bye."

The practice requires only a few participants (the Moore-Mason couple), and key materials are retained (favorite television shows). This tech-mediated practice mirrors the couple's natural interactions, so core meanings and components are readily reconstituted, in stark contrast with elaborate practices.

Second, simple practices can survive asynchronous technologies that surface as problems for elaborate practices. Members who use only basic technologies are often isolated from family-level practices. However, regardless of the family's technology ecology, members easily adapt simple, shared activities. Coviewing a favorite television show can be facilitated by phone, over text, or using Skype, among other technologies.

Third, time-independent practices are better able to survive. Lily Potter explains, "What we used to do is we would open a can of condensed milk and eat it right out. So, when I do that by myself, I might text [sister Heidi] and be like, 'I just opened a can of condensed milk!'" Whereas ritualistic practices often are time dependent, these sisters can text about a favorite snack anytime. Nods to colocated practices

accentuate absences but also prompt a shared world and recapture a piece of it.

Sacred pieces (trajectory 5). The sacred pieces trajectory illustrates how core components of elaborate practices are repackaged in ways that are easily transferrable. Families preserve the sentiment of a Home Sweet Home practice without the onus of reassembling the entire practice. They retain pieces of a sacred practice that engender shared meanings otherwise lost.

Many families realize the experience gaps are too wide to reassemble elaborate practices. Thus, families do not attempt heroic quests but instead realign components and find a new path to practice reassembly. They salvage pieces through small gestures. The Potters created a life-size cardboard cutout of daughter Heidi "just to have her around" when she left for college, and now they send picture texts of the cutout doing things with the family. Heidi's mother says, "We'll put her in pictures." Heidi explains, "There was one [photo] on Lily's birthday with her and the cake and the cutout." The media reports stories about military families also using cardboard cutouts to include deployed family members in life events. In these cases, low-capacity components drop out of the reassembled practices, but a diluted form of the practice that carries core meanings survives.

Other examples include e-mailing pictures of birthday gifts for dad rather than shopping together (Keller family), posting videos of the family at the dog park (Powell family), or sending chocolate-dipped fruit in place of family fondue night (Knox family). In this last example, Jared Knox (son) highlights how components realign around a new brand as the family reassembles fondue practices while he is at college: "My favorite thing my parents send is the Edible Arrangements dipped fruit.... It reminds me of family time. We 'fondue' together.... One time, I had a really bad week ... everything went wrong. Saturday morning comes a knock on the door: Edible Arrangements. I imagined my mom knew I needed her." Nods to the practice preserve core meanings, and brands can insert themselves into the reassembled practice by carrying these meanings.

Consistent with assemblage theory and central to this trajectory, meanings can shift from one component to another. The Norris family offers a low-tech example:

> I've collected postcards from all over the world when we traveled. So I have hundreds of postcards, and they are all dated with who we were traveling with.... Randomly I pull those postcards, and I send them to him [Skylar, son].... I try to come up with a little story from that trip.... [I asked] him ... how he felt about that. Was it intrusive? .... And he said, "Oh, no, I save them all." (Delilah, mother)

Delilah's actions were inspired by a *Family Fun Magazine* article she read when Skylar was four years old. This simple suggestion prompted a valued connection. Note that here actions were an intentional process for reassembling the core meaning of the practice. A follow-up interview with Skylar revealed that when he takes trips now, in the absence of his parents, he continues these sentiments by transferring the meaning to a new set of objects:

> I pick up coasters at restaurants or bars ... and I write a little note sometimes about who's with me and when .... I pop them in an envelope and mail them to Mom and Dad. Sort of like documenting ... what they aren't here for. [Interviewer: How did you think of that?] Really, it was my mom's reaction.... I realized she was giving me her memories on these cards. She was so happy I kept them. And I thought I should be sending her stuff.... I was fiddling with the coaster and I thought, I should save these and send them to my mom. Then she can have some of my memories. The ones she missed. (Skylar Norris, son)

Here, as key components are realigned, meaning shifts from the postcards to the coasters. Especially when meanings are linked to low-capacity components, decoupling meanings from particular objects, forms of participation or spaces, and relocating these meanings to different components (e.g., new brands, actions) is significant for the survival of practices. In a member check, Skylar's mother reveals, "I may have gone my entire life thinking they just accepted my weird little plan. Instead I discovered that the guys supported it.... It wasn't just a mother's labor of love, it was a family practice."

The sacred pieces trajectory also could emerge in response to failed trials. For example, bedtime stories for the Kennedy family were about father–daughter bonding and sharing the day (e.g., Matthew would ask, "What books did you read in school this week? Did you sing any songs? What were they?"). However, the meaning might be salvaged by shifting to practices that are not time dependent and with fewer components, such as sharing a snack over Skype.

Discussion

We offer three primary theoretical contributions. First, we explain how tech mediation affects family consumption practices and theorize technology's role in practice reassembly across distances. Second, we combine assemblage and practice theories to account for the movement of practices from colocated to tech-mediated spaces. Third, we introduce the imaginative capacity concept to assemblage theories. We briefly consider each contribution in turn.

First, our study uncovers boundary conditions on the need for copresence, showing how practices shift when social networks are geographically dispersed. Scholars have focused on the need for "ongoing and direct social interactions between peoples and social groups that constitute a proximate social structure" (Urry 2002, p. 256). We specify necessary conditions for colocation and when tech mediation works. Like families, companies focus on reassembling elaborate practices (e.g., global cross-functional innovation teams) rather than on the more informal assembly of simple practices (e.g., constant accessibility, multidevice communication). Companies such as Google and Yahoo recently have enforced strict bans on remote work policies, on the assumption that unconscious, informal practices that happen between meetings or in the hallway contribute substantively to innovation and teamwork. Google's chief financial officer Patrick Pichette said of working at an office, "There is something magical about sharing meals ... spending the time together, about noodling on ideas, about asking at the computer, 'What do you think of this?'" (Grubb 2013).

These below-the-radar practices are important and are exactly what Google and Yahoo are trying to retain. Our findings suggest that it is possible to reassemble these practices organically (through the easy translations trajectory). To substitute tech-mediated practices for colocated practices, meanings must be detachable from their origins so that virtual interactions can stand in for the touch, emotionality, and feel of corporeal interactions.

Our second contribution disentangles how practices adapt, an understudied need that contrasts with practice theories' emphasis on habituation (Schatzki 2002; Warde 2005). Although researchers have acknowledged that practices may be differentiated across situations and actors (Gram-Hanssen 2011; Schatzki, Cetina, and Von Savigny 2001; Warde 2005) and that new practices emerge (Arsel and Bean 2013; Shove and Pantzar 2005), previous research has failed to trace the evolution of practices from disruption to reassembly. Adding an assemblage perspective to practice theories enables us to map practice trajectories by showing how practice components can be decoupled and reassembled in new ways across time and space, with capacities (material, expressive, and imaginative) central to closing the experience gap (see Figure 1). Figure 2 further leverages practice dimensions (simple/elaborate) to anticipate likely practice trajectories and take managerial actions. Our findings evaluate the likelihood of practice survival as a function of how practice dimensions, separation type, motivation, capacities, and the family's technology ecology shape the experience gap. Mapping practice trajectories enables us to anticipate outcomes on the basis of existing patterns. Simple practices are most likely to follow the easy translations trajectory, whereas elaborate practices often follow the failed or no trial trajectories; however, there is room for alteration. Thus, we specify the necessary interactions that distinguish heroic quests from failed trials by highlighting how component capacities influence the experience gap and likelihood of reassembly. Importantly, high levels of one capacity can compensate for low levels of others. The combination of components and how they boost or limit one another is revealing. Neutralizing or strengthening key capacities might create a viable reassembly of at least a portion of the practice (e.g., introducing technologies that level the playing field and provide ways for families to connect).

Third, assemblage theories do not consider imaginative capacities. They were emergent in our study and central to whether and how families are motivated and able to reassemble practices. Imaginative capacity explains why components with low or unexercised capacities might manifest in new or reconstituted assemblages. Given its centrality to practice survival, the imaginative capacity also presents substantial implications for marketers, as we describe next.

How Marketers Facilitate Family Practice Reassembly at a Distance

We offer two levels of strategic implications. First, our data provide marketers direction to help families reassemble practices as tech mediated. Second, we posit specific marketing strategies to create, sustain, and leverage brands in colocated and tech-mediated practices. Both levels respond to our second research question: what are the implications for brands and how can marketers leverage an understanding of how practices are reassembled during separation? At the family practice and brand levels, managerial strategy should focus on diagnosing, boosting, and realigning to shift practices and/or brands from colocated to tech mediated (from the bottom to top quadrants in Figure 2). Table 2 illustrates how various industries can modify current strategies to leverage our findings to help reassemble family practices at a distance.

Table 3 draws on our findings to provide practice-level marketplace exemplars and uses Netflix as a single brand-level example that has navigated family practices across distances particularly well. To translate these examples into action, marketers should first identify how their products and brands are currently or potentially linked to families' practices. Second, they need to determine which spaces are relevant (Figure 2). For example, how simple or elaborate are the practices? The dimensions in Figure 1 help marketers correctly diagnose the experience gap. Third, marketers must consider likely trajectories for practices. As Table 3 illustrates, marketers can anticipate and influence which trajectory their products and brands are likely to follow by examining capacities as well as relations among common components within that practice. For example, what material, expressive, and imaginative capacities are related to their products and brands? What other components must have high capacities to ensure that the brand survives? Where are the likely low-capacity elements that would induce a failed trial? Fourth, marketers must take action. They could expand low capacities, cocreate templates that allow families to take on heroic quests, or enable features to make the brand central to a sacred pieces trajectory. Next, we elaborate each action item (diagnose, boost, and realign) and provide practice-level data and marketplace examples, as well as brand-level exemplars focused on Netflix.

Diagnose the Nature of the Experience Gap

Determine root causes for gap. An important strategic precursor is to diagnose the cause of the experience gap between colocated and tech-mediated versions of the associated practice. This requires consideration of the practice dimensions (elaborate/simple) to determine where brands are located (Home Sweet Home vs. Simple Joys) and which trajectories they are likely to follow during practice reassembly. The gap may be closely linked to the type of separation. Anticipated separations allow brands to target family segments with solutions that enable practice survival. Alternatively, for unanticipated separations, brands can create templates to bridge the gap in ways that families and other brands cannot. Finally, the root causes for the gap may stem from the family's technology ecology. Brands can either develop new technologies that facilitate family practices or partner with companies that offer this expertise. For example, Macy's partnered with LBi International to create

TABLE 2
Potential Industry Opportunities

Industry (Firm)	Current Status	Potential Opportunity
Consumer packaged goods (Procter & Gamble)	Encourages fortress brand placement within family practices (e.g., holiday celebrations)	Create templates placing brands into sacred pieces of the practices and within simple joys.
Communications (AT&T)	Provides customized family packages, including free family-member-to-family-member calling	Create templates and resources for extending beyond dyadic communications to allow multiway calling and video chat.
Distribution (Amazon.com)	Consumers can have an array of products delivered to their home or office quickly	Create customized family practices "in a box" using member preferences; enable easy replication of family practices and the ability to send elements to distributed members.
Grocery (Kroger)	Third-party grocery apps dominate the social grocery shopping space; home delivery is limited	Allow for family shopping lists and coupons to be shared within a family network; enable consumers to create customized care packages to be delivered to recipient addresses.
Movie theaters (Fandango)	Enables local purchase of tickets	Allow local and remote ticket purchase so that a member can buy tickets for distributed others remotely on the same weekend to allow for family movie night.
Pharmacies and drug stores (CVS)	Provides individual loyalty cards and individual medical records	Enable family loyalty programs in which family members can collectively bank loyalty points; enable family-level medical records.
Airlines (Southwest)	Provides individual loyalty programs that allow for individual mileage accumulation	Allow for family loyalty programs in which all family members can collectively bank the miles and distribute the awards. This would keep whole families loyal and ensure new generations of loyal consumers.
Home improvement (Lowe's)	Allows households to create a home profile storing information about all Lowe's purchases for the home to aid in warranty issues and repurchasing	Enable families with multiple, possibly distributed, households to create linked profiles; allow multiple family members to vet renovation and decoration ideas before purchase and to repurchase and enact warranties.
Restaurant chains (Olive Garden)	Olive Garden's tagline through 2012 was "When you're here, you're family" (dropped in favor of "Go Olive Garden"). Olive Garden encourages consumers to use it to host family events (e.g., reunions, birthdays, graduations, holidays).	Olive Garden's new tagline could be "Even if you're not there, you're family": the chain could equip select booths in major markets with video chat capabilities, thus enabling families to dine together at two different locales.
Insurance (USAA)	USAA's tagline is "Mine was earned…Begin your legacy." Auto insurance is handed down from generation to generation.	Improve insurance offering for distributed family use (e.g., allow for linked auto claim records so that a student away at college can have parents assist with claim).
Retail chains (Macy's)	Macy's Magic Mirror kiosks in a few major markets enable social shopping	Develop a range of templates and resources for social shopping and remove current social shopping barriers (e.g., create free Wi-Fi hot spots to boost expressive capacity).

the Magic Mirror technology (for customers to "try on" clothing by displaying an outfit overlay onto a customized digital form) and with Facebook and Pinterest to share Magic Mirror images. Macy's Magic Mirror, available in New York City, experienced peak usage during proms, graduations, and the summer months of wedding season, occasions that require family and friends' input. The technology allowed for remote participation in reassembled shopping practices, but as Table 2 suggests, it stopped short of realizing opportunities for social shopping at a distance.

Diagnose low capacities. Failed trials frequently result from low-capacity components that stifle reassembly. Marketers can diagnose low-capacity components and change trajectories in the following ways. First, some low-capacity components may not carry meaning or contain relevance to the brand. Marketers can omit these components so the practice is easier to reassemble. Second, marketers could boost capacities of important components to ensure practice survival. For example, ESPN fantasy football enhanced the material capacity of enjoying football together for the Thomas brothers and their father and provided a template to carry on this ritual (increasing imaginative capacity). Adding video chat to the site would boost expressive capacity. Third, marketers can substitute low-capacity components by determining the essence of the practice that could move to entities with higher capacities (e.g., how Edible Arrangements stood in for fondue). Finally, by using a mediation strategy, marketers can overcome low capacities. When technology ecologies result in low material capacities, marketers could enlist bridges (family members who facilitate others' participation) to close the gap.

TABLE 3
Managerial Actions

Strategies	Practice-Level Actions	Data Examples and Marketplace Exemplars	Brand-Level Actions	Same-Brand Examples (Netflix)	Relevant Trajectory
Diagnose	Examine practice dimensions, technology ecology, and separation event to diagnose root causes for gaps and opportunities in other spaces	Perhaps by diagnosing distance, time, and technology ecologies as causes for the experience gap in tech-mediated bedtime rituals, Nabisco advertisements instructed families on how to use Oreos as a bedtime snack paired with video chat. Oreo becomes a tangible comfort object when an embrace or snuggle is not possible.	Identify low-capacity brand components and recognize opportunities to boost or realign with high capacity components	Diagnosing time and access, Netflix allows movie sharing across multiple family members' devices. Originally, Netflix had low expressive capacity, inhibiting tech-mediated movie night. Families can now convey emotion by posting emoticons that boost expressive capacity. Netflix could further partner with other high-capacity brands (e.g., Skype).	All
Boost	Basic prompts: small efforts to demonstrate how simple practices could become tech mediated	To boost material capacities, the Grocery IQ app enables consumers to suggest branded products and specific quantities to others in their defined network (e.g., Alejandros tortillas in a 12 pack).	Highlight brand's material, expressive, and imaginative capacities	To boost capacities, Netflix relaxed its mono-use rule allowing for simultaneous access on multiple devices (material capacity) from a single account to enable tech-mediated family movie nights.	Easy translations
	Cocreate templates: provide customizable templates or guidelines for continuing elaborate practices remotely	The MyLowe's service enables families to create and track project lists populated with customizable products. This allows families to share project ideas and implementation remotely. Similarly, RealEstate.com enables families to search, archive, and annotate real estate listings.	Enhance brand's capacities	Netflix could create templates in which members send family invitations to meet virtually using real-time chat/video to maintain elaborate practices. Netflix could boost expressive capacity by allowing family members to record audio clips or use a "sticky note" function to mark and share segments.	Heroic quest
Realign	Leverage essence: deconstruct practices to determine which components capture meaning and translate them to tech-mediated spaces	Skype could promote tech-mediated family practices, as the Barro family did with the laptop standing in for the remote son, Wade. Multiple devices that facilitate live family exchange (emotional contagion, side comments) helps translate the sacred.	Position the brand as central to the essence/meaning of the practice	Netflix can be central to family movie night because it captures families' favorite movie experiences and provides similar content. Netflix can remain if the tech-mediated practice is stripped of other components (e.g., popcorn, blankets, candy).	Sacred pieces
	Realign according to root causes for gaps (change combination of key practice components to facilitate reassembly)	When the tech-mediated practice does not capture the family's elaborate game night, failed trial may result. Pogo's online Trivial Pursuit game enables remote family to choose participants (i.e., it is not an open game) and post an avatar, comments, and emoticons to capture emotional engagement.	Brands should partner with high-capacity components (e.g., new partnerships, new technologies) and/or strip low-capacity components	Netflix could recognize that current platforms have low expressive and material capacities. Netflix could partner with other brands (e.g., Orville Redenbacher) to send coupons or other promotions in advance of movie night.	Failed trial
	Practices can shift to a different trajectory (can help families leverage sacred pieces or inspire heroic quests by providing templates)	For families who have never tried shopping remotely together, Macy's could develop customizable templates designed to maintain sacred pieces (e.g., visual choice vetting, real time encouragement) to elaborate on its Magic Mirror technology. This tactic would help ensure trial instead of letting the practice atrophy.	Brands can shift to new practices	When stuck in no trial, Netflix could move to high-capacity practices families are already doing across distances. For example, Netflix could create a feature that allows siblings/couples to watch television shows together, share clips, or send favorite movie quotes that sustain inside jokes.	No trial

Boost Capacities for Reassembly

Enhance brand capacities. Brands could boost material capacities by expanding or digitizing materials; books, music, movies, and games easily translate, but less obvious products can also improve material capacity through delivery options. Kleenex initiated a campaign encouraging consumers to "share the care" with distant sick loved ones using an online code to send a Care Pack that contains tissues, lip balm, hand sanitizer, and coupons. Similarly, firms offer the service of creating snack care packages featuring popular brands such as Chex Mix and Snickers for deployed military and students studying away from home. Expressive capacities could be enhanced using technologies that capture voice, gestures, and emotionality; Xbox Kinect's live features provide a full range of such interactions. Marketers also may boost imaginative capacity by providing basic prompts or templates for reassembling practices.

Basic prompts. During separation, families elevate mundane practices. As such, the Forget Me Not space (Figure 2) is an ideal strategic space for brands. Families can easily reassemble simple practices, and small efforts on the part of companies could facilitate this transformation. For example, Nike introduced a series of "challenges" through Nike+ so consumers can track and compare running performances online and share daily results to reassemble this coalitional exercise practice. Later, Nike expanded performance sharing to overall activity, including walking, biking, and gym workouts (Nike Fuel). These challenges encourage brand placement within the practice, create switching costs that require new brand use (i.e., the tracking technology within the shoes/watches), and inspire loyalty. Furthermore, minor technological improvements, ads that prompt "sharing the day," and/or simple, firm-generated templates serve as catalysts for practice reassembly. These basic prompts also initiate and reinforce the ways that brands become embedded in family practices.

Cocreated templates. Providing tech-mediated templates for elaborate, colocated practices can rescue brands that would otherwise be used less frequently or displaced during compressed family time. Cocreating templates gives marketers influence over practice trajectories. Products or brands stuck in the Home Sweet Home quadrant because of failed or no trial can become heroic quests through templates that increase families' imaginative capacity. Although platforms exist for facilitating dispersed relationships, most were initially developed for other purposes (e.g., connecting organizational workforces), or they lump all types of relationships together (e.g., Pinterest displays sibling pins alongside those of friends, acquaintances, strangers, and companies). Similarly, new platforms such as social television—a geographically distributed, socially shared viewing experience—leverage tablets' and smartphones' "second screen" to enhance dispersed television viewing (Steinberg 2012). The discussion currently focuses on how companies can dominate multiple screens rather than enabling the intimate social networks consumers care most about and that heavily influence purchase behavior. Tweets or product links from companies can be disruptive, but similar messages from family members may be powerful. Companies ignore the potential of connecting families. With few exceptions (e.g., see eFamily/Famiva), families lack platforms to support intimate, connective ties. More intimate platforms can offer sophisticated yet intuitive photo/video/chat features to provide varied participation, the ability to curate and purchase (Pinterest) to integrate important artifacts, and spaces for coviewing television (Hulu, TV.com), playing games (Words with Friends, Social Rummy), sharing stories (Book Buzz and Record-a-Story), recipes (Foodily, MyRecipeBook), or grocery lists (Grocery IQ, Grocery Gadget) with delivery options to encourage reassembly.

Realign Key Components

Leverage essence. One of the most promising opportunities for marketers exists in providing mechanisms for reassembling families' elaborate, sacred practices. This involves generating templates for families to capture the sentiment of elaborate practices by transferring sacred pieces across distances. To do so, companies must deconstruct elaborate practices into their components. In some cases, this necessitates shifting practice meaning to high-capacity components (preferably brands). As Campbell's works to vitalize its image of home, warmth, and wholesomeness (Kozinets 2010; McGee 2011), new ways to "share the warmth" through technology provide for reassembly of elaborate practices. For example, a mother can tailor her daughter's favorite birthday recipe with the added ingredients that make it "Mom's recipe" using her Campbell's Kitchen iPhone app and share it with her distant daughter on Facebook. Similarly, sending a picture text of Symphony chocolate bars during family movie night can make distant family members feel included in ways that conjure the emotion and meaning of the more elaborate tradition. Embedded brands could serve as the prompt that keeps a practice alive.

Shift to a different trajectory. We emphasize the risk of practices staying in the no trial trajectory. However, our findings also uncover opportunities for practices to shift to a different trajectory. Escaping the no trial trajectory can be accomplished by leveraging sacred pieces (as described previously) or by taking on a heroic quest. Proactive companies will find opportunities to help practices survive. Microsoft is working on interfaces for parents who travel to stay connected to their children and participate in practices previously abandoned across distances (e.g., a mother can video chat with her daughter and help choose family recipes to bake, so they can make pies together for the school bake sale [see http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a6cNdhOKwi0]).

Reconfigure components. When practices followed failed or no trial trajectories, there were clear instances of low-capacity components (e.g., Foster family dinner, Kennedy bedtime stories, Keller board games). Marketers could seize these opportunities by reconfiguring the practice to include or elevate their brand's position as a high-capacity component. The Kellers' two favorite board games have different capacities: Hasbro allows multiple users to play Trivial Pursuit online through its website, whereas

Mattel's Apples to Apples is difficult and expensive to access virtually. Hasbro could reconfigure family game night around playing Trivial Pursuit online together; the firm could begin by leveraging customer relationship management data to encourage frequent family use, thereby reconfiguring the practice to make the brand central. Alternately, Mattel could partner with other high-capacity components to ensure reassembly.

Directions for Further Research

The experience gap between colocated and tech-mediated family practices and the causes and strategies for overcoming it leave significant unanswered questions and opportunities for further research. In this section, we highlight just a few possibilities.

Our findings anticipate the likelihood of practice survival as a function of practice dimensions, separation type, and characteristics of the family's technologies. However, more specific research is needed on how the separation event affects motivation to reassemble. Experimental or case analysis research could examine how available templates boost imaginative capacity and motivation to reassemble family practices. Research could specifically address how the combination of component capacities influences the experience gap and likelihood of reassembly. Our findings propose that neutralizing or strengthening key component capacities can compensate for low levels of other capacities and that imaginative capacities play an important role. There are opportunities to systematically investigate how imaginative capacity varies across families and can be leveraged to enhance likelihood of practice reassembly. In addition, we uncover how the family's technology ecology facilitates practice reassembly, but more research is needed regarding how this ecology evolves over different types of separation events.

Marketers can use our findings to help families and strategize their brand's place in colocated and tech-mediated practices. At this stage, we offer examples of how companies *could* respond. Supply-side data are necessary to better understand conditions under which different responses are most effective. The four quadrants and trajectories in Figure 2 provide marketers with a novel template for generating new commercial opportunities. Particular quadrants may be more relevant for some companies than others. Some firms might strategically focus on easy translations and sacred pieces trajectories using simple brand prompts and templates, whereas other firms might strategize to reduce the experience gap and enhance the likelihood of a successful heroic quest by boosting component capacities or neutralizing asymmetries in technology ecologies. Research is needed on whether and how the strategies prompted by Figure 2 and outlined in Table 2 actually work for marketers. Finally, beyond the scope of this project, research could examine whether our tools are useful for other types of organizations aiming to reassemble simple and elaborate practices as tech mediated. For example, we propose that our findings offer theoretical implications for ongoing debates about copresence in companies, but further research should test the boundaries of our framework in an organizational context.

In summary, we examine the role of brands and mediating technologies in helping families reassemble practices across distances. We posited that these choices are not random but rather are patterned and dependent on the relationship between and among practice components. Brands can insert themselves into continued and evolving practices by diagnosing, boosting, and realigning capacities for reassembly. Furthermore, the technology ecology of a network (in this case, a family) affects how consumption practices develop, morph, survive, or are displaced.

Conclusion

We find that when family practices are tech mediated, sacred family rituals are not safe havens for brands. Commitments shift, contexts are difficult to replicate, and practices follow many potential trajectories. Figures 1 and 2 detail the necessary conditions for survival and map the trajectories for reassembling practices as tech mediated. They provide guidance for marketers, identifying opportunities to play a role in reassembling family practices at a distance and influencing the trajectories of practices that rely on and entrench their brands.

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